

Doctoral Thesis
“Searching for the Archetype”
Field – VISUAL ARTS

Abstract

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“The creative process, to the extent we are able to follow it, consists in the unconscious stimulation of the archetype and in its development and amplification until the accomplished work.

The creation of the primordial image is somehow a transposition into the language of the present, by which anyone was allowed to find again the access to the most profound sources of life... in this lies the social importance of art: it continuously work on the education of the spirit of the epoch, as it brings those aspects which it was missing the most. ”

Carl Gustav Jung



“The Archaic” –mixed technique on canvas, 50 x 50 cm

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Within the doctoral thesis entitled “Searching for the Archetype”, our aim is to achieve a particular investigation of the archetype, focusing on the artistic approach represented by our own experiments and researches, presented as “case studies”, on the line of a own original modality of representing and revealing the archetype.

The resurrection of archetypal values, by the appeal to the main resources of creation and the linkage of such archetypal values to the tendencies of present art, complete the area of our preoccupations regarding the deciphering and analysis of the archetype in art.

We intend to approach the archetypal phenomenon especially from the perspective of the visual arts as a creative activity generating imaginary worlds, full of symbolism, forming a junction point between the artistic creative process and the *imaginarium* derived from the personal lyricism. We therefore speak of archetype as root of the manifestation of the unconscious and of the conscious knowledge, as well as the fundamental influences of the archetype, in the mythic philosophic and religious thinking, approaching also the connections which are established between the various cognitive theories and the artistic phenomenon.

The paper contains four chapters structured as follows:

Chapter I - **On the Archetype**

Chapter I II - **Archetypal Forms**

Chapter III - **Globalization Versus Archetype**

Chapter IV - **The Own Creation as Means of Analysis of the Archetype**

This approach involved the study of the archetype from a structural perspective, the determination and demarcation of the manner of manifestation of the archetype in the visual arts as well as the relations it established in its center.

The first chapter, “**On the Archetype**”, is dedicated to the presentation of the concept of archetype, analyzed from multiple perspectives, starting from the metaphysical nature thereof, continuing with the psychological one and ending with the cultural nature of the archetype. The analysis of the archetype as phenomenon cannot be made without evoking the schemes that result from the interaction of

archetypes, of the dynamic skeleton of the imagination, which in contact with the social and cultural environment determines the great archetypes.

A basic approach was made by psychoanalysts. Thus, according to C.G. Jung, man unconsciously fights for achieving the knowledge of the self in order to reach a psychological equilibrium, and this universal goal, pointed out by archetypes as main experience, is lived as emotions or as images, and their effect is visible in typical human situations (birth, death, transition phases of life or the great fears). Archetypes are according to Jung¹ prototypes of symbolic aggregates so deeply engraved in the unconscious, that they would form a kind of structure – which the Swiss analyst designates as “*engrime*”. Archetypes exist in the human soul as ordered and at the same time ordering *models*, emotive ensembles that share these constant structures and not apparent shapes that can vary according to the epoch, ethnicity or individual, the archetype achieving the link between the universal and the individual. Among the most important archetypes quoted by Jung mention should be made of the penchants representing the male part of the psyche, while the soul symbolizes feminineness, the mother’s figure, who took care of us, as well as the authoritative figure of the father, *the thief*, that dark side of us and *the shadow* our primary animal side. *The sleep* is the land of unconsciousness which communicates with consciousness by means of archetypal symbols, and archetypal images are nothing but primordial images transformed in dreams, modified according to the period (the era) when they appear.

This method of anthropological analysis allows us to analyze the exchange which takes place at the level of the *imaginarium*, between the objective and subjective representation of the item, by means of the previous experiences the subject had with the environment. It is precisely this experience with the environment which forms a normative effect which results into psychoanalytical and cultural complexes. The anthropological itinerary can be delimited by the psychological and cultural nature of human motivations.

The manner in which images converge in organizational nuclei defines real symbolic scheme and aggregates, which represent the human manifestations of the

¹ Fordham, Frieda, *Introducere în psihologia lui C.G. Jung*, Ed. IRI, București, 1998

imagination. Precisely these manifestations represent the core to which converges the anthropological archetypology.

The starting point for the analysis of the archetype is represented by the human psyche, the convergence dictated by the image-contained semantics, condensing multiple meanings in one scheme. This scheme forms the dynamic skeleton of imagination which in contact with the social and cultural environment determines the great archetypes.

At the same time, references were made to the most important archetypes, to the fundamental relation and the types of representations established within the philosophical – religious and mythological systems.

We assigned a wide space to the hierophantic theory of the archetype (in the case of Eliade), the scheme theory (the archetypes being general images that unconsciously model thinking) from the perspective of Durand, as well as to the abyss theory of the archetypes in the collective unconsciousness in the case of Jung.

In chapter two, “**Archetypal Forms**”, starting from the research of the archetype, we followed the relation form - archetype - image in the context of visual arts, the relevance by which the artistic image as an aggregate becomes a complex sign which unites the archetype, the expression and the meaning.

The plastic image is a representation that participates in the knowledge activity reaching a form and developing at the crossroad of two worlds, an inner one (the one of soul feelings) and an outer one, of the matter.

Strict delimitations of the form, approached from a fixed observation point, do not represent in fact the visual explanation of the representation of the object. It can rather be considered as a visual experience in a given spatial and temporal context. Just like the aspect of the object is influenced by the one of the things around it, in space, it is also influenced by the images preceding it, in time.

The relations between the objects in the past and in the present, as well as the relation of the environment with the other objects, represent in fact a visual memory of the family items. This memory can influence the shape we perceive giving birth to different interpretations. Thus form acquires semantic valences, the simple fact that it is seen transmits messages about the subject.

From the spatial point of view, the identity of a visual object depends to a smaller extent on its figure, than on the skeleton on which the form is created. A different orientation from the basic one points out a different structural skeleton, affecting to a greater or smaller extent its identity.

We notice that this universe of visual arts is one in which the work of art “forms” the image, confers a definite form, and the form provides the concreteness to the object.

The concept of form is found in all modalities of plastic expression: line, surface, volume, color, and it defines an experience. Thus, the plastic experience of the work of art is given by the sum of the fragments, whose meaning and internal solidarity is given by the compositional aggregate.

The analysis of the particularities which pertain to the form in general and the archetypal form in particular is meant to identify and recreate the manner by which it is created in a type of communication with distinct particularities within the visual arts.

The notion of form imposed a careful analysis in the context of visual arts, as it represents a fundamental category which shows by its manner of organization a content, it has a constructive and at the same time suggestive function interacting with the different elements of plastic language.

Gilbert Durand in “Arts and Archetypes” remarked that the breaking of the relation between the symbolizer and the symbolized, of the contact to language, to the visual, to the word, inevitably leads to an alienation of the individual.

Visual arts represent, in their quintessence, an object of expression, they are a language, therefore a significant communication, but the problem of the localization of the archetype in an archetypal image or form, respectively in a symbol, represents, according to the same author, one of the most disputed aspects within archetypology.

Such reconstitution of the particularities which pertains to the archetype form has as reference the reality and is born from the interaction of the visual arts with the viewer and last but not least of the patterns it generates.

The end of the chapter contains forms of manifestation of such patterns in the contemporary visual arts, the importance and the manner in which these are interpreted by the artist.

Chapter three, “**Globalization Versus Archetype**”, is dedicated to the contemporary period, the manner in which the archetype interacts within the globalizing culture, the mutations it suffers in the field of means of expression specific to the visual arts.

Globalization is a fundamental vector of our times, which marks the reorganization of the world by the phenomenon of expansion of the civilization, of development and interaction of the social and economic relations.

The information globalization phenomenon, under the effect of the new means of communication, leads to a mutation of the world, to the modification of cultural experiences. The phenomenon as such includes a diversity of manifestations in different social fields and describes the changes of modern society in the context of world economy and of the new media flows. The theoretic considerations show that globalization represents nothing but an uniformization, a standardization of culture, the doping with television and internet creating a phenomenon of barbarization of man.

The culture of a society is transformed into show and commodities, eliminating humanity in favor of pseudo-culture, pseudo-science. Culture-less and deprived of the ancestral roots of tradition, man risks to become a simple number which lives only for consumption.

An important role in aestheticizing the banality of daily life is the one of mass-media as vector of globalization, creating the patterns for artistic tastes which place an interrogation mark on the statute of the work of art (art understood as specific phenomenon).

We paid a large attention to the globalization phenomenon by analyzing the principles and the determining factors which started the phenomenon, as well as the relation it establishes with the meaning and the specific artistic manifestations of the period. Therefore, we described the principles which are at the basis of postmodern culture, and we also pointed out the common denominator of the postmodern artist, his aversion for convention and complicated rethoric.

The different statements we made in this chapter regarding postmodernism are sustained by arguments and theories which define the features and characteristics of the concept.

The last part of this chapter was consecrated to the manner in which the archetype is perceived within postmodern visual arts, the mutations visual arts suffer in terms of means of expression.

The final chapter of the thesis, **“The Own Creation as Means of Analysis of the Archetype”**, is dedicated to the detailed case study of the main archetypes and the manner in which these interact within the own creation, the own works analyzed as “case studies” representing the “keystone” of our preoccupations pertaining to the archetype theme.

Archetype represents a junction point between the *imaginarium* and the artistic creative process, pertaining to images which differ from one culture to another, by interpenetrating schemes.

Another aspect which needs to be pointed out is the mixed nature of the archetype – “networks of associations centered in a certain archetype can be related with all other archetypes, and only by a tone specific to the affective – sensitive element one can distinguish the limits between them”² – and the paradoxical nature of the archetype pertains to the very contradictory nature of reality “according to the Christian process named union without amalgamation”³, and also to the double and at the same time circular nature of this concept.

Conclusions

Man in archaic and traditional societies carries out his life according to cosmic cycles, and the cyclic regeneration of time by the return to a mythic time of the origins represents a strategy specific to these societies for suspending the profane time. Thus, archaic cultures survive by this abolition of the profane time, by the participation to the archetype and by the repetition of an infinite time.

² Stroe, Mihai, *Romantismul German și Englez, știința arhetipurilor, ipoteza interfinitudinii și numărul de aur*, Ed. Institutul European, Iași, 2004, pag. 90

³ Wunenburger, Jean-Jacques, *Filozofia imaginilor*, Ed.Polirom, Iași, 2004, pag. 350

Compared to the archaic man, modern man lives in an unsacred universe which positively valorizes history, so that the archetypal significances survive hidden in profane realities, codified in myths, archetypes and symbols, of which the modern society and the reasoning man are not aware.

During the 20th century, the contrast between the old world and the new world was stronger than anytime in the history of mankind. It is actually within during 20th century that striking changes took place in the substance of a culture and the social mechanism of culture, with regards to both the vision on culture and the technical infrastructure of the cultural process.

The tensions between tradition and innovation are an interior evolutionary mechanism for all cultures. The history of culture often registers mutations, turns of perspectives, whenever creators and forces that revolve the cultural paradigms, the symbolic systems appear, and all these changes get integrated in an evolutionary chain. Cultural values, that synthesize an epoch and a manner of understanding the world, acquire, by their ideatic and expressive force, the trait of permanence, becoming references for the consciousness of a society.

Art has a special statute in the configuration of any culture as it represents the highest form of human creation, it is creative of worlds and meanings. At the same time, we can say that visual arts represent a creative activity, generating imaginary worlds full of symbolism. The artistic image is seen as a complex sign, which organically unites the expression and the meaning, as a sign capable of raising, by the expressive form and its original composition, a chain of feelings and mental representations in the viewer's consciousness. Moreover, the work of art can be watched as form of knowledge, as a system of meanings which shape reality and recreate it in an imaginary symbolic plan, but at the same time it is also a form of communication, a language (an artistic one in this case) which codify an informational content.

The work of art in its intimate structure reunites multiple human conditions, aspects and significances – ludic, psychological, religious, philosophic, etc... – cumulating in its texture a system of signs which it transfigures.

Thus the work of art is a carrier of significances, it can be interpreted differently, and any interpretation can be considered as a recreation of the work of art itself. If the creation process ends with the completion of the work of art, the artistic phenomenon continues due to the social and communicational circuit it enters into, exercising its effects on the viewer. From this point of view, we can state that the reception of a work of art is an active process, a form of continuous human activity, which involved the visual perception of the work, its understanding and interpretation. All these moments have a subjective dimension, and the viewer has a creative contribution in these processes of reception of the work of art. We can consider the work of art as an indefinite reservoir of meanings, so that the opening of the work of art claims for an open aesthetic consumption.

The viewer is himself formed by the artistic production of an epoch, by the prevalent codes and languages used by the artistic creation of the time. His perceptive habits, his mental and imaginary patterns, his ways of thinking, his relations to the archetypal universe, are all formed by the direct aesthetic experience, by the consumption of artistic objects, contemporary art requiring from the public a “creative reading”, which involves though a certain spiritual availability.

This viewer’s relation to the archetypal universe represents the common denominator in the initiation of the visual dialogue with the work of art, requiring from the public a subjective, creative, active behavior, and the artistic message appeals to archetypes, contains in itself the possibility of being deciphered and interpreted in various ways, according to the viewer’s experience and sensitivity.

The archetype is a point of junction between the *imaginarium* and the artistic creative process, being connected to images which differentiate themselves from one culture to another by complex interpenetrating schemes. These archetypal schemes are pointed out in the ample analysis of the personal works from the last part of the thesis.

This analysis of the personal creations starts from the idea behind each own work of art, from the archetypes within the compositions, the applied techniques, as well as from the plastic construction as a coagulating expression factor of an archetypal reality. Regular stable shapes serve as a mnemonic function when calling

upon archetypes, and also at the imprinting of the artistic representation in the human psyche.

The element of “novelty” that we propose consists in the “resurrection” of the archetype hidden in the profane reality, its valorization and linkage to the tendencies of nowadays culture, by the own ideatic and artistic approach, by the permanent relation to an archetypal universe. The archetype becomes in this context a starter by which the viewer reaches the intuition of a hidden truth, the revelation of humanity.

Pertaining to this reality, the final conclusion is that archetypes are the primordial image, representing that “exemplary model” characterized by the constant universality.

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